TALES AND PLAYS

Paris Reads Novel of Hungary

QUAND ISRAEL EST ROI. By Jerome and Jean Tharaud. Plon-Nourrit: Paris.

"ONE day in the fall of 1899 a young Frenchman arrived at Budapest. Nobody was at the station to receive him and he had a good deal of trouble to find his baggage and get a man to carry it to his room, for he did not know a word of the Hungarian language." Since then he and his brother, the authors of this new book, have learned as much as any outsider could of the Jews of Hungary, Poland and the Ukraine region. I wrote THE HERALD of their two earlier books some months ago.

They have traced the ancient "wild Jew" of Galacia through his progress from pedler to money lender, from employee to owner of estates, finally to business man or journalist of the city. In Budapest they paint the "Maison Orczi," a kind of ghetto-caravansary, where certain stages in this metamorphosis may be studied. They find in the types here "something which survives all changes of costume and of fortune, even all the perpetual variations of thought."

Hitherto the Tharauds have examined the problems of the relationship between Jew and Gentile from the descriptive or static point of view. Now they consider the whole situation dynamically, with special reference to the Hungarian revolution. And at the end they leave the eternal question.

They have written a well ordered drama of Hungarian history, leaving only the denouement, the communist experiment. In the first acts, the exposition, the two cities of Budapest came to life—the old Magyar fortress of Bude and the later German-Jewish town of Pesth. Bude was long the vanguard of Christianity. "Her old rock is like Marathon, Salamis or the Catalonian fields, one of the places where the fate of our civilization was fought out with the Orient."

But the town of Pesth, across the Danube, bowed before the invaders. It should be added that the assault upon her was almost impossible to withstand—"invisible, repeated, like an inundation which mounts by insensible degrees rather than the splendid shocks of armed combat that play so large a part in the glory of written history."

So the insidious Orient, driven back for two centuries from Bude, kept making its way little by little into the other town until one fine day Pesth woke up to find herself mastered. This pervading force spread out across Hungary. In many quarters the Jews had succeeded the ancient hereditary nobles as proprietors of the land. And having secured commercial control of the country, they became involved in a communist revolution, the prologue of which was the assassination of Count Tisza.

Jerome and Jean Tharaud have drawn an arresting portrait of the murdered man which recalls the figures of the great Huguenots of the seventeenth century. Issue of a severe old Calvinist family, with stern bearing and powerful frame, "he was an accomplished sportsman, a fencer of the first rank, who accepted all challenges and commonly wounded his adversary, an intrepid rider, a great lover of the chase. . . . A simple unwavering soul dominated by clearly defined convictions, almost elementary in character. Obstinate in his thoughts, austere and ready to sacrifice every thing for his faith, he seemed to find a morose satisfaction in the unpopularity in which he had always lived."

In 1914 this man was Prime Minister, and as such participated in the Cabinet counsel where the Serbian ultimatum was passed upon. So his people and the world in general have looked upon him as one of those responsible for the cataclysm. The brothers Tharaud in a new and dramatic recital of the war's prelude give a contrary version. They show Tisza setting himself against his colleagues in the effort to maintain peace. And when during the war and after the defeat popular hate centred upon him his pride kept him from seeking justification in revealing the truth.

Evidently Capt. Cezerniak, who was arrested in August, charged with the assassination, was ignorant of this version.

As in the French Revolution and in the recent Russian revolution, the liberal aristocracy seems to have played a great part. The Tharauds have little liking for Count Karolyi, the Kerensky of the Hungarian uprising. They picture him as a degenerate, dominated only by ambition. This seems an unfair view. Karolyi's principles were excellent, though, like Kerensky, he was soon displaced by the rush of events.

In reality "When Israel Is King" is more than a history of Hungary. It is a brief for Hungary, diminished, mutilated by the treaty of Trianon. And a plea of this kind is generally directed against some one even more than in another's behalf. And it must be said that their plea for Hungary would be more effective if it were not encumbered with anti-Semitism. They do not take the trouble to be consistent.

They identify the Hungarian with the Occident and the menacing Orient with the Jews. To set the Magyars in opposition to the Orient is a strange error! A branch of the Tartar race they have remained pure Asiatics. That explains their relations with the Jews, which resemble those between the Turks and the Armenians.

Their aristocracy is composed of functionaries and soldiers, high headed, courageous and strong, luxurious in their manner of life, incapable of labor, of organization or of commerce. The Jews undertake tasks they scorn in the liberal professions and in trade. In that sense one may speak of Israelite "rule."

But is it not a little too paradoxical to call "When Israel Is King" the history of "an anti-bourgeois revolution" in a country where before the war "out of a hundred doctors, engineers or journalists fifty were Jews" and the rest in like proportions?

Nevertheless, the book holds the reader's interest from beginning to end. It is written in a style at once rich and precise, in which memories and emotions are carried with their full force. I am neither pro-Semite nor anti-Semite, but seek to bring to the reader a true report of our growing literature as it appears. PANAME.

Child Learns by Acting a Part

Little actors in a fairy play.

THE STAR-CHILD AND OTHER PLAYS. By Rita Benton. New York: Writers Publishing Company.

A LIKABLE volume, this, in the modern mood! R. L. S. would have approved it, one feels pretty sure. So would—so will—the thoughtful childhearts of the world to-day. So will the Small Folks themselves, for whom they are written. For they are a collection of joy bringing plays. Academicians will like them too. That is, they will tabulate reasons—these terrible pedagogues—why these plays should be enjoyed by children. But the children will just fall for them instinctively without giving you any reasons. Which is the most authentic tribute, after all. Oldsters—pedagogues and book reviewers and the like—will feel called upon to give their reactions, a tedious process at best. The youngsters will simply delight in them. They will just take them and use them. "Gee, such fun!" they will say. They will not, thank God, "react"—self-consciously. They will take them into their lives without any suspicion of having to get themselves educated.

One hesitates to use the word, but this volume is indeed a "contribution" to modern child literature. It is not the old accustomed drivel—what Shaw's "Savvy" would call "obsolete rot." It shows more plainly than many ponderous volumes on pedagogy just how far we are progressing from the unbeautiful rigors and disciplines of the past. It gives free rein to the play instinct of the child, opening new doors to the imagination and leading it through many corridors to the temple of beauty.

These plays are adaptations from stories, poems and old Greek legends. They are interesting both in their quality and in their rich variety. They are drawn, for example, from stories by Tolstoy and Oscar Wilde, from poems of Longfellow and Lowell and from Lessing's "The Ring of Magic Power" and John Hay's "The Happy Man."

Their author, Rita Benton, specialized in the drama while at Vassar College and afterward wrote the plays included in this volume and a number of others for children of the settlement at which she worked in Chicago. They are designed for boys and girls between 8 and 14. The acting time of each play is forty-five minutes and there is an average of about eight rehearsals to a play. They have been produced, often under Miss Benton's direction, in many settlements and schools in Chicago and elsewhere. Their success has already given their author a recognized place in the field of juvenile dramatics. They have all been acted by children, says Miss Benton, mainly for the joy of pageantry, but in part to assist in the building of a children's settlement, a House of Happiness, where also they have been performed.

For Miss Benton the "play's the thing"! She believes with William Butler Yeats and others that "the simpler the setting, in general, the better." Her sense of artistic values leads her to feel that the stage trappings must be subordinate to the play itself. Another reason, were there no other, is that settlement productions require simplicity of staging and costuming. "For indoor scenes," says the author, "a plain, brown burlap has been found the best for a peasant setting; for kingly scenes have a handsome curtain at the back, a dais and a throne. For outdoor scenes hang a deep blue curtain; against this, if desired, place real palm, box or bay trees, or have the conventional shapes cut out of wood and printed a Noah's ark green."

It may be held by some that certain plays are too tragic. True, many of them are sad, but most of them have a happy ending. Again, does not this satisfy the aesthetic sense of children in much the same way as tragic drama does certain grownups who have been heard to remark, "It was the best matinee. I cried all the way through it"?

The dialogue too is robust. The language of peasants and kings alike is simple and stands out refreshingly. It has not been denatured. A few native expressions of undiminished strength have been allowed. The plots are simple, and while they certainly do lie outside the child's experience, they do not lie beyond the area of his imagination. MARY SIEGRIST.

Very Short Stories With Sharp Edges

AND THE SPHINX SPOKE. By Paul Eldridge. Boston: The Stratford Company.

THIS is a collection of short stories or tales that conform more to the pattern of fables or the tales of Poe than to the formula for the modern short story. The reader should not look here for stories such as are found in the *Saturday Evening Post*. They are not the things that the reading public has learned to expect from the "successful" writer. In the first place, these tales are very brief. This slender volume of not more than a hundred pages contains some fifteen tales as well as an equal number of sketches or impressions under the general head of "Pastels."

Mr. Eldridge has variety of subject and singleness of treatment. The mood and color of the tales are more or less uniform. It is not the roseate glow of success or inflated prosperity, but rather a cold, white light that reveals configuration and characteristics not always pleasant.

In the words of one of his characters, life for Mr. Eldridge seems to be "a dream that grows old and crumbles and turns to sand. Life is gilded dust, but the gilt rubs off and the dust remains." He views this shoddiness of being, the worn and threadbare places in the carpet of existence, with a grim, sardonic humor. A hasty reader might characterize his point of view as sordid or unsympathetic. But it is not Mr. Eldridge who is sordid; rather, the corners of life and the particular human souls he has chosen to depict. He does it with a sympathy bred of clear vision untempered by sentimentality.

Mr. Eldridge is characterized in Benjamin De Casseres's introduction to the book as a "perfect artistic pessimist . . . as fine an artist as he is an incorrigible pessimist." But the word "pessimist" is likely to be interpreted variously, according to the mood. To some people any one is a pessimist who admits the corruptibility of the human species. The apt characterization of a pessimist as one "who Fletcherizes his quinine" is too narrow; rather might not the genuine pessimist be one who Fletcherizes everything, both the bitter and the sweet, and generally concludes, after due reflection and meditation and chastening of the palate, that eating is, after all, but a necessary evil—like the rest of life. Mark Twain once said that the man who became a pessimist before 40 knew too much, but that the man who didn't become a pessimist after 40 didn't know enough.

Concede, then, that Mr. Eldridge is a pessimist—an intellectual pessimist. One might surmise as much from his book. That he is also an artist the tales in "And the Sphinx Spoke" bear ample testimony. That he is not incapable of smiling is also clearly evidenced

This book will delight the literary epicure. As Mr. De Casseres closes his introduction: "It will appeal to that Immortal Ten Thousand which . . . have always existed on earth—the Ten Thousand worth writing for."

A Opened Letter To Harry Witwer

THE LEATHER PUSHERS. By H. C. Witwer. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

To Mister H. C. WITWER,
c o Los Angeles Pressing Club.
Please forward.

DEAR WIT:

Well, Wit, if I am not the first genuine book reviewer to call you Wit, I'll bet I am the first of that coo-coo clan to call you *witty*. By genuine book reviewer I mean to the viz., a paid up member of the Fourth's Estate which really reads books and dashes off pieces about them and not no police reporter that does a story off the jacket and barters the review copy for what is popularly dubbed the wherewithal to buy a package of smokes and a deck of paper matches.

In my frank and outspoken way, Wit, I assure you I have never met up with a genuine reviewer who give you the credit for America's national trait, to the viz., wit and humor. How the so ever don't lose no sleep over this. Winning the esteemed enmity of these literary ghouls who prey on accredited authors' books because they can't write a book theirselves is the greatest compliment you could have. If them guys knows what's humor, then General John Joseph Pershing has led a uneventful life. And that's *that!*

But just to let you know what a college degreed literary critic talks about behind your back, let me repeat what one of the ilk informed me about you. "Wit-wah! Wit-wah! Oh! Yes, yes. I recall. Wit-wah is the, ah, auth-aw who once mixed soda wat-aw in Yonk-aws, is he not? Yes, yes. He still mixes soda wat-aw. The, ah, nut sundaes, so to speak, of mod-awn light lit-aw-too-ah! Yes, yes." Well, Wit, at that this baby come pretty near right. For a bimbo that don't live on my and your more denser populated half portion of this planet Earth, I'd say he was at least as close as Suzie Lenglen was to winning a place in the hearts of our country clubmen; and she lost, if you can believe what you read in the papers, only by a cough.

The writer has just sat up half the night through, Wit, with your latest child of the brain, "The Leather Pushers." And the undersigned would beg to state that "The Leather Pushers" has got more laughs in it than the Woolworth Building has steps.

Having been a personal follower of your writings for many years, there was one extra laugh in which you now get a cordial's invitation to join. It was that part where by what might be nicknamed innuendo you pose as a fight expert. Why, Wit, you ain't no fight expert. I know you picked Dempsey to beat Carpenter, but that was like picking the politicians to run the country. Who was that farm bred, self-trained athlete you selected out of the two possibilities to cop at Toledough OhighO? Probly you've forgot by now, eh, Wit? Well, Wit, my memories is long. When your selection dropped to the canvas, three of my dollars dropped with him charged to your account. But I don't hold it against you, Wit. I'll let bygones be bygones. Only I can't help thinking that at four % per annum them three smackers would by now be growing up to $3.36. That was such a lesson to me, Wit that when you predicted Carpenter didn't have a chanst at the Thirty Boyle's Acres I went against my own better's judgment and ventured three more on Dempsey to lose.

How the so ever, this latest nut-sundae of yours which has been entitled "The Leather Pushers" I would suppose because it must be some editor's idea of what might be a slang term for the fighting gentry and not because no dyed-in-the-wool fightfan ever called a fighter a leather pusher, should make you a lot of jack. If the hero, Kane Halliday, turns out to be as popular with the book buyers as he is with some of us book bummers I would if I was in your shoes affectionately refer to him as Sugar Kane on the account of the sugar and etc. he brings in. But, not to give no unasked advice, you should have let a sporting's authority like Joe Vila who sets the pace give you a more slanger term than leather pusher for a title.

Well, Wit, this being a book review and a opened letter I suppose I ought to knock the public for a row of trolley poles by telling what's in the book, so that I'll spoil the story for the readers and they won't have to go and buy one. But on second's thought I'll just tell you what my beautiful and charming wife and helpmeet said last night when she commandeered that I drop *that* book and turn out *that* light to go to *that* bed. She talks French like Jeanne Harmon, your notable Character of Fiction, on account of our son Jacques having had one lesson already in the language of diplomacy out at his school in the land of the Flatbush.

"Helos!" she exclaims, "you are but the leetle of the fool. It is you who write so good like Monsieur Witwer. For the why do you geeve away to the public the plot. *Non, non, non!* Go to show them the cust-oom-ars, the how of which Mr. Witwer does the writing. Then, *mon cher*, the what of which he writes will be of the insignificance. *Voila!*"

So that was that. Yours truly,
DUD SIDDALL.